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## OUR CITY VIGILANCE LEAGUE.

BY THE REV. DR. CHARLES H. PARKHURST.

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THE principles and purposes of the above organization admit of being stated distinctly and concisely. Its origin dates primarily from the condition of public feeling excited by the presentment of the March Grand Jury of 1892. Prior to that there had been charges publicly brought against the Police Department, in particular, for criminality in discharge of its duties. There are certain statutory obligations resting upon that department which admit of no evasion, and disregard of which is as distinctly criminal as is the infraction of any law against murder or burglary.

The obligations thus specifically referred to are those summarized in Section 282 of the "Act of Consolidation," as follows :

It is hereby made the duty of the police force, at all times of day and night . . . carefully to observe and inspect all places of public amusement, all places of business having excise or other licenses to carry on any business, all houses of ill-fame or prostitution, and houses where common prostitutes resort or reside ; all lottery-offices, policy-shops, and places where lottery tickets or lottery policies are sold or offered for sale ; all gambling-houses, cock-pits, rat-pits, and public common dance-houses, and to repress and restrain all unlawful and disorderly conduct or practices therein ; enforce and prevent the violation of all laws and ordinances in force in said city ; and for these purposes, with or without warning, to arrest all persons guilty of violating any law or ordinance for the suppression or punishment of crimes or offences.

Of that statute the procedure of the Police Department is a distinct and continuous violation. That is to say, in view of the existence of that statute, the Police Department of our city, from the top down, is permanently criminal. Whether the members of that department believe in suppressing the social evil, the gambling habit and violations of excise, has nothing to do with it. They are paid for enforcing the law, and for them to neglect

its enforcement on the ground that they think there is some wiser way of handling these evils, is an impertinence for which they deserve to be smartly rapped. Certain criminals the department will jump upon, and set its entire machinery in instant motion, in order to secure conviction, but it is itself more criminal than the criminals whom it nabs, for it makes a mockery of criminality by making a plaything of its obligations to suppress criminality, and by discriminating between criminals at the behest of considerations that are neither far nor hard to seek.

The public needs to be reminded of the following expression occurring in the presentment above referred to: "They enforce the law in many respects in a superior manner, but if they be permitted to discriminate in favor of certain forms of crime, for reasons well known to themselves, there is no telling where the same course will lead them to or land the interests of our city. Circumstances and testimony offered have tended to show financial considerations in some cases for lax administration. Indeed the publicity with which the law is violated and the immunity from arrest enjoyed by the law-breakers is inconsistent with any other theory."

Now that is substantially an indictment of the Police Department, and that indictment has not been met by the Department. Those of us who have been watching the course of events know that crime was just as rampant in this city the last two weeks before the first of December as it was during the last two weeks before the first of April. Now that is our one permanent point of assault.

If the writer of this article may be allowed a personal reference, there has been no effort made by him during the last ten months that has swerved a hair's breadth from the purpose to make police criminality in this respect a matter of general acquaintance and of public consciousness. We have not been dealing with the gambling habit. We have not been concerning ourselves with the social evil. We have no interest in the social evil as such. Our one unswerving purpose has been to show the community that the department, whose duty it is to lay a strong hand on these matters, is viciously negligent of its duty. And what is more we did show it, and that is why they hate us for it.

I have been thus detailed in my statement of the situation in order that it might be understood easily what is the scope of the

Society whose character and purposes I have been requested to set forth in this article. On taking up the work of the Society for the Prevention of Crime, somewhat more than a year ago, subsequent to the death of the deeply-lamented Crosby, we found ourselves confronted by a peculiar condition. The members of that Society were substantially of one mind in their conviction that, numerous as were the specific violations of crime in this city, there was another evil which we had to face, which was still more of a menace to our municipal character and weal. Violations of crime are bad enough, but they stand in no comparison with the peril of a condition of things whose very genius it is to gender violations of crime. Immediately on its re-organization the Society tackled that question.

The present president of the Society stated at that time that he would have no interest in throwing himself into the work if it was to be confined to the prosecution of specific infractions of statute. It was decided that the duty immediately before us was to antagonize the existing relations between municipal authorities and criminals which made crime easy and secured to it immunity. Pursuant to that end we avail ourselves of such means as are at hand for securing and giving publicity to the evidences of an unholy compact between those who commit crime and those whose prime duty it is to prevent its commission. That, then, is the immediate purpose of the Society for the Prevention of Crime.

Now that Society and the City Vigilance League are concentric. The members of the latter might be termed associate members of the former. They have the same president. They have the same axial purpose. They might be designated as being the inner and the outer circles of the same organization. We have the same rooms as our headquarters. One and the same man is the secretary of the two. Religiously and politically we have the same platform. That platform is made broad enough for any man to stand upon who believes in pure municipal government, whether he be Protestant, Catholic or Jewish, and whether his affiliations be with the Democratic, or the Republican party, or with Tammany Hall.

The perfect coincidence in point of scope between the two organizations puts us in a position to meet the charge which has been brought against the League that it is a spying organization.

It is a spying organization in exactly the same sense that the Society for the Prevention of Crime, in the pursuit of its present purposes, is a spying organization. We have ample ground for suspecting the honesty of conduct of a good many of our municipal servants, and in view of the fact that they are our servants we are watching them. We are not watching the community at large. Though we had a member of the League posted on every block, that would not alter the case at all. We have a considerable number of municipal servants in our employ, whose salaries are being paid out of our pockets ; we suspect these servants, some of them, of not doing what they are paid for doing, and we are watching them to discover evidences of their infidelity. Now if that kind of watching is what our enemies choose to call "spying," they are welcome to the term, although, of course, we understand perfectly well that they select that designation for the reason that they know that their own behavior is iniquitous, and therefore desire to discredit and render unpopular any scheme designed to embarrass their crooked practices. The one principle by which we are animated is that these officials are our hired servants, and as such it is part of our civic responsibility to look after them, and the more they resent that idea and call it names, the more evident it becomes that they need looking after. If a man is at the head of any ordinary business and suspects any of his employees of a mischievous use of any of his own funds he does not consider that he is "playing the spy" upon them if he keeps a shrewd eye upon their operations so far as those operations have to do with his business and his money. The fraudulent employee would probably call it "spying," but nobody else would think of doing so.

One object which we have had in view in enlisting in this work a large number of men, especially in young and middle life, is to inculcate exactly that idea, that there is a responsibility for these matters lodged in us *as citizens*. We are not going to be safe here in this city till there comes to be among us a general recognition of the fact that citizenship entails responsibility, and not a responsibility that is discharged by the occasional dropping of a ballot at election, but a responsibility that survives election and that follows the citizen all the way round the year till the next election comes. We here in New York are in the sad condition in which we find ourselves to-day for the reason that we have to

such a degree relegated municipal responsibilities to our official subordinates that they have become practically irresponsible parties, and instantly resent the idea of being called to account. They have come to stand to us in very much the same relation that domestic servants often stand in towards their mistresses, who by being left for a little time too much to their own behests acquire the idea that they are themselves the mistresses, resent as vicious interference anything in the way of rebuke or criticism, even though emanating from the employers who pay their monthly wages.

The City Vigilance League has been established then in part as a means of inculcating on our younger men a sense of civic responsibility. In our meetings together, we are not accustomed to mention the Mayor or the District Attorney or the Superintendent of Police or any other official with bated breath. We never mean to be disrespectful or insolent; but our deliberations are conducted in distinct recognition of the fact that they are paid by us to do our municipal business for us, and as such that it becomes us to handle them in their paid relations to us with the same frankness precisely as that with which Mr. Smith handles the clerk in his offices, or that with which Mrs. Jones handles Bridget in the kitchen.

Of course such doctrine as this is not congenial to the parties in office, but, then, that is their concern, not ours; but we trust that in time they will become so accustomed to it as to treat it with a little more suavity than seems natural to them just at present. No matter how many municipal officials we have, this is still *our city*. The Mayor is bound to look after the citizens, but the citizens are just as much bound to look after the Mayor. The Judiciary must sit on the bench, but the citizens must sit on the Judiciary. There is no man so faithful that he does not need to be watched in order to be kept faithful. I mention these facts, because they constitute a part of the catechism of each City Vigilance Leaguer. These principles, it seems to the members of the League, none can resent or criticise, except such as desire to serve their city for the sake of the pecuniary dividend there is in it.

Another point emphasized among the members of the League is that citizens in order to fulfil their civic functions in the midst of a depraved and ill-governed city must become intensely con-

scious and frankly assertive of the authority properly inhering in them in their civil capacity. One man with the right on his side, and knowing that the right is on his side, is quite a crowd. Mere arithmetical proportions do not signify, any more than in the instance of a crowd versus one hornet; if the hornet is feeling well and his works are in good repair, the size of the crowd is the very last thing that comes into account. Everything pivots on the hornet.

We have stated the circumstances out of which the League grew and the principles by which it is animated; it will be in order now to say something as to the specific work which it is doing. In attempting to apprise the community of the delinquencies, to use no harsher term, of the existing municipal administration, the only enginery we can bring to bear is facts.

So far forth the City Vigilance League may be considered as an organization for the gleanings of facts tending to certify the community of the fidelity or infidelity of its public officials. General as is the conviction that things in this city are not what we have the right to expect them to be, there is not that detailed knowledge of the situation that is needed in order that the matter may come home with power and effect to the intelligence and the conscience of the community at large. It is that situation precisely that creates the necessity for such an organization as the League. We have no politics. Our only ambition is thoroughly to know our city, and to make the facts that relate to its character and administration perfectly perspicuous to the average mind, regardless of all partisan or sectarian differences.

Our preliminary need is of 1,137 men, honest and durable, who will undertake to represent respectively each of the election districts into which our city is at present subdivided. The duty of each of those men will be to make himself thoroughly conversant with all that concerns the district under his charge. So far as in any way bears upon questions at issue he must know his district through and through. It is recommended, in order to insure thoroughness, that each supervisor should prepare a chart of his own district, with the names of residents so far as he may come to know their names, nationality, etc. Buildings used for other than purposes of residence should be considered in detail, and their character noted so far as such memoranda can be of any use in securing the results already specified. This will include schools and saloons, a full account of which later will embrace such par-

particulars as the brewer under whose auspices the saloon is run, the general tone of the place, the relations subsisting between it and the policeman on the beat or the captain of the precinct; whether it is kept open in unlawful hours, the age and character of its customers, whether it is licensed, and if so whether its existence is necessitated by the paucity of saloons in the neighborhood or whether people living in proximity are enduring its presence under protest. The survey and tabulation must of course include a statement as to all houses of prostitution, pool-rooms, policy-shops and gambling-houses in the district.

In this connection it ought to be said that it is emphatically urged upon supervisors that nothing should be done by them that can be any moral menace to them or that can put taint even upon their reputation. So far as relates to the gleanings of this class of facts the Society for the Prevention of Crime and its detectives can be employed. Everything relating to the condition of the streets will also come under the purview of supervisors, such as their cleanliness, the condition of the paving, and in cases where paving is being laid, whether it is being laid according to the terms of the contract. The above specifications, although not comprising all the lines of work contemplated, will suffice to illustrate the spirit and intent of the League, which is that wherever the administrative blood beats in this city the finger of the League shall be upon it counting its pulsations.

The work of gathering in the required number of supervisors is being carefully but energetically pushed. There are at present thirty assembly districts in the town. When our organization is complete each of these assembly districts will have its assembly supervisors, and will be thereby constituted president of the district supervisors comprised within that assembly district. There will thus be thirty subordinate organizations, which will all be comprised within one comprehensive organization through the agency of the managing committee of thirty assembly supervisors. We are not crowding things with inordinate haste but are trying to take the careful measure of each new man we receive. We are most of us in early or middle life, and hope to be spared to a good many years of active and useful service.

C. H. PARKHURST.